

Infancy

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tween husband and wife should stop as soon as the wife knows she is 843
pregnant, that is, when she ceases to have monthly periods. With a very 183
young wife who becomes pregnant before her first menses, intercourse
should stop when she first notes the physiological changes accompany-
ing pregnancy. In actual practice, however, a husband sometimes has
intercourse with his wife until the last month of pregnancy. This is
often true for young men who do not have second wives. Older men [915]
who have been able to afford a second wife—and they are in the mi-
nority—usually take up residence with the other woman. The result in
such polygynous families may be the birth of offspring to alternate
wives.

A woman works all through her pregnancy, often doing fairly heavy 843
field labor. It is recognized, however, that work which is too heavy may
produce miscarriages, so that women who want children are careful not
to overstrain themselves. Food preferences during pregnancy also are
recognized and indulged.

There is a series of prenatal taboos, knowledge and observance of
which vary greatly from individual to individual. They apply primarily
to the mother, but there are one or two applicable to the father as well.
For instance, a pregnant woman should not place a new pot on the fire,
because if it blackens, her child will be born with patches of darker
pigment. A pregnant woman should eat only the less desirable belly
portions of rats. If she eats the hind- and forequarters, her child's limbs
will spread at birth like those of a rat spitted for roasting. A man should
not straighten arrows during his wife's pregnancy, for the child would
then be born with eyes rolled to one side. However, after straightening
an arrow shaft the father can rub it on his wife's abdomen and the
child's eyes will straighten.

There are many such superstitions, but their weight and importance 854
seem no greater than comparable ones in our own society. It is worth 827
noting, however, that these prenatal influences indicate a sense of close
intimacy between children and parents and that often there are anti-
dotes for harmful acts. The sense of intimate physiological connection
between mother and child persists after birth, so that mothers who
were nursing sick infants came to me for medicine they could take in
order to cure their children. I could discover no parallel native medica-
tion, however.

When labor pains begin, the mother goes to the house of a kins- 844 ●
woman if possible. If no kinswoman's house is near by, she may give
birth in her own home. Usually the husband is not present, merely as a
matter of good form, although there is no strict rule on this point. The

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- 844 woman's attendant is preferably her mother, but here too expediency will dictate the choice of midwife. Actual birth occurs in the privy-corridor just off the living room, where a group of interested kin, both male and female, may have gathered to chat while awaiting the birth. Children too form part of this group.

Meanwhile the mother sits with her legs spread and tugs at the rafters overhead to help her in her labor. The midwife sits directly opposite with her legs outside of, and parallel to, those of the mother. Between them lies a piece of pandanus mat on which the child is placed as soon as it is born. The midwife cleans the child with the thick juice squeezed beforehand from banana bark. When the afterbirth is ejected, the midwife measures a length of the umbilical cord reaching to the child's knees and severs it with a sharp sliver of bamboo. The end of the cord still attached to the child's body is coiled up on its abdomen. The birth fluids have meanwhile drained through the floor boards to the pignen below. The afterbirth is placed in an old areca basket and is left to disintegrate in the bamboo thicket on the village boundary. A stillborn child is treated like the placenta. It is interesting that this type of disposal parallels that for human heads and spirit-bird bundles when their ceremonial treatment has been completed.*

- 553 After completing birth the mother picks up the child, wraps it in
[846] the softest piece of woven or bark cloth available, and joins the group of friends and visitors in the living room. People present suggest various names; those of maternal and paternal grandparents are preferred. If a child begins to urinate or to nurse after a name is suggested, that is
[557] the one adopted. Given names are feminine or masculine. For further identification both men and women carry their father's given name as surname. They never take the stepfather's name.

- 844 One gathers the impression that birth is considered an easy and casual procedure and that problems in beginning nursing are not a matter of formal concern. This does not mean that difficulties never occur, but it does indicate that the society has not emphasized such difficulties. There is also no emphasis on modesty in connection with birth, although on other occasions there are strong feelings about exposing the genitals. Birth is definitely women's business, but men are not completely excluded.

In this connection, and despite my emphasis on the casualness of the procedure, it is an interesting contradiction that many men feel a certain disgust if they are offered food prepared by a woman who has served recently as a midwife. When I discussed this matter one day

* See pages 130-31 and 160-61 for descriptions of these ceremonies.

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with Fantan the Interpreter in the presence of his sister and a female cousin, he expressed strong feelings about it and his face wore an unmistakable expression of disgust. His sister and cousin began to tease him, referring to his own birth. The discussion ended laughingly—as do many of the good-natured arguments on sex differences—with the comment by Fantan's sister, "Men are bad; women are good."

The midwife who assists at a birth is given a small gift, usually a moko, whose value may range from one to three rupiahs. The longer and more difficult the birth, the larger is the fee paid. Midwives who have had to manipulate the child by reaching into the mother's body expect larger fees.

There are few anecdotes of difficult births. One woman of about forty, well informed in such matters, could recall only four deaths in childbirth. This is certainly no measure of maternal mortality, but it does indicate both that childbearing is relatively easy and that the culture does not stress the importance and difficulty of the occurrence. No mother died in childbirth during the eighteen months that I was in the village. In the half-dozen births I witnessed, the mothers at no time showed signs of pain beyond acute discomfort. They groaned softly and perspired freely but seemed on the whole to give birth with little difficulty. In one case where the afterbirth was long in coming, the woman massaged her abdomen, scratched her loins, and combed the knots out of her hair—devices that were all believed to assist her in labor.

After giving birth the mother stays in the house from four to six days, which seems to be the time necessary for the end of the umbilical cord to dry up and drop off. Naturally, infected navels occur fairly often and are treated with poultices of mashed leaves. The dried end of the umbilical cord is saved in an areca basket. When the child is able to crawl, the cord is placed on a bundle of corn, which is presented to the maternal grandmother, or, if she is dead, to some equivalent kin. When the grandmother accepts the gift, the bit of cord is flicked off and ignored.

During the four to six days spent in the house, the mother rests and devotes herself exclusively to fondling and feeding the infant. At this time the child's warm water baths are begun. Depending on the solicitude of the mother, these warm baths are repeated at least every two or three days, until the child can walk. After that it is bathed in cold water.

The mother's material needs during the period of confinement are primarily the concern of her brother and secondarily the concern of

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informant said, "We hear that the soldiers on the coast know how to ⁵⁸⁶ have intercourse while standing, but we don't understand such things." Inquiries about fellatio brought negative responses but precipitated the following folk tale about intercourse through the nostril.

"Long ago men on the Kebola peninsula did not know how to have ⁵³⁹ intercourse with their wives. They did not know that women had ⁸³¹ vaginas, so they had intercourse with their wives through the nostril. A man from here had become a slave and was sold to the Kebola people. The wife of his owner was pregnant from nasal intercourse, and the husband did not know how the child could be born. He said he would have to kill his wife, slit open her abdomen, and remove the child. So the slave said, "All right, I'll do it for you." He went up into the house, chased all the people away, and took the woman out into the privy, where she gave birth in normal fashion.

"The slave hid the mother in a large storage basket and gave her the child to care for. Then he went out and buried a banana stump in a grave on the edge of the dance place and sacrificed a chicken. The husband asked, "Have you finished burying the dead person?" And the slave answered, "Yes." He said the child was already there but that the father could not see it. After three months, when the child could laugh, the slave took the father up into the house where the mother and the child were. He said, "Now I shall show you how this is done." Then, while the father sat there, the slave had intercourse with the woman. Since then the Kebola people understand how to sleep with their wives, but there are still some who seek intercourse through the nostril."

Cunnilingus was a definitely shocking idea.* In connection with chil- ⁸³³ dren, it was stated that kissing is not known in the area. However, mouth play involving biting is practiced. Informants report that wrestling and mock fighting is often a preliminary to the sexual act. Night is considered the proper time for intercourse. Encounters during the day and outdoors are considered risqué. Women accuse men sometimes of preferring the latter type of encounter.

Inquiries from various women concerning anal intercourse produced a rather shocked denial of its existence. Anal birth, however, was re- ⁸⁴⁴ ferred to quite casually by a few older women but was unknown to some younger ones. The women who professed to know of such phe-

* Since there is a good deal of prudery about discussing these matters, this in- ¹¹⁵ formation was secured largely from one person, Fantan the Interpreter, after our ¹²⁴ relationship had been firmly enough established for me to be reasonably sure he would answer as honestly as he could. My command of the native language and opportunities for private conversations with women were not adequate for this sort of investigation.

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- 844 nomena gave circumstantial accounts. For instance one old woman said, "Yes, Kolata gave birth in this fashion. The placenta also was discharged through the anus. People placed a poultice of leaves on her as one would for a wound. It was just that the child took the wrong path. Another time, Kolpada had me for a midwife. The child's head appeared through the anus, so I massaged the child back into the abdomen, turned it around, and brought it out through the proper passage." I must confess myself at a loss to explain this particular fantasy.

- 837 In connection with other topics, reference has been made to continence practiced by men and to frequency of intercourse. Men report that during their early married life they have intercourse sometimes as frequently as every night, but that every other night is considered more nearly the average. However, when a man has two or more wives this may mean that a woman has fewer opportunities for sexual activity than her husband. Further, it will be recalled that men are not supposed to have relations with their wives from the beginning of pregnancy until the child can sit up, or at the very least begin to laugh. This is a period of about twelve to fifteen months. They are also not supposed to sleep with a menstruant.

This might impose considerable restraint on men if they observed the restrictions, which often they do not, and if no other women were available. Furthermore, men are generally expected to be continent during the months of preparation attending financial displays. All these factors might seem to place men under considerable periods of restriction. Probably a man who wishes to avoid them is quite able to do so either by finding other women, especially widows, or by simply discarding the proscriptions in respect to his wife. Since these proscriptions have no attached sanctions, the attitude of his wife will be the determinant should he wish to disregard them.

- 753 A man's unfaithfulness may have deleterious effects on his children.
684 During the course of eighteen months there were several cases in which sick infants were taken to seers to have extracted from under their sternum a piece of a woman's belt string. This is considered a sure proof that the father has been unfaithful to the child's mother. In none of these cases did the mothers take any drastic action against the men. Their attitudes were those of quarrelsome reproach and did not lead to divorce proceedings. These were among the few instances in which personal hostilities were not translated into financial terms and fought out on that level.

- 831 Attitudes toward the male organ were difficult to determine but by indirection certain hints were available. For instance, gossip had it that